

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 2975

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, PE, EC
SUBJECT: ECUADOREAN ACCESS TO THE AMAZON: THE SECRETARY'S LETTER

REF: (A) STATE 083864; (B) QUITO 2203

1. I DELIVERED THE SECRETARY'S LETTER TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER ON APRIL 5 HE READ IT CAREFULLY IN MY PRESENCE AND COMMENTED THAT IN GENERAL HE FOUND IT A CONSTRUCTIVE GESTURE. HOWEVER, THE MINISTER TOOK EXCEPTION (AS DID HIS ECUADOREAN COLLEAGUE -- REF B) TO THE THIRD PARAGRAPH AND ITS REFERENCE TO AVOIDING "PUBLIC DECLARATIONS". DE LA PUENTE SAID HE WAS "UNCOMFORTABLE" WITH THAT STATEMENT AND COULD NOT ACCEPT ITS IMPLICATIONS.

2. THE MINISTER ASSERTED WITH SOME EMPHASIS THAT HE HAD NOT ENGAGED IN "PUBLIC DEBATE" HE SAID THE GOP COULD HARDLY HAVE DONE OTHERWISE THAN REACT AS IT DID TO AN "OFFICIAL SPEECH" PRONOUNCED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF ECUADOR BEFORE "THE ENTIRE ECUADOREAN GOVERNMENT". HE REMARKED THAT AN AIRPORT COMMENT BY EVEN A FOREIGN MINISTER COULD BE OVERLOOKED (PERHAPS HAVING IN MIND HIS OWN OCCASIONAL INDISCRETIONS AT PLANESIDE), BUT THAT SUCH A FORMAL DECLARATION OF POLICY COULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO
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PASS UNCHALLENGED. THE MINISTER ALSO NOTED THAT HE WOULD NOT ASK THE ECUADOREANS TO EMBRACE THE RIO PROTOCOL PUBLICLY, BUT WOULD HAVE EXPECTED UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT THEY WOULD HAVE REFRAINED FROM A PUBLIC DENUNCIATION OF THAT DOCUMENT.

3. I TOLD DE LA PUENTE I THOUGHT HE WAS MISREADING THE

PARAGRAPH IN QUESTION. THE SECRETARY WAS OBVIOUSLY SPEAKING IN A GENERAL SENSE AND WITHOUT ANY INTENTION OF SINGLING OUT ANY PARTICULAR PAST DEVELOPMENTS SUCH AS THE MINISTER'S PUBLIC DECLARATIONS. DE LA PUENTE CONCEDED THAT THAT MUST BE THE CASE BUT SAID HE INTENDED TO KEEP THE LETTER TO HIMSELF FOR THE TIME BEING TO AVOID POSSIBLE MISUNDERSTANDINGS IN THE GOP. HE ADDED THAT HE WOULD IN DUE COURSE REPLY TO THE SECRETARY, "BUT ONLY IN A GENERAL FASHION". I SAID THAT WHAT WOULD INTEREST THE SECRETARY WOULD BE HIS VIEWS ON THE FUTURE COURSE OF THIS PROBLEM. THE MINISTER REPLIED THAT HIS AND AYALA'S BEST EFFORTS HAD BEEN OVERTAKEN BY "ELECTIONS". IN ADDITION, HE OBSERVED THE ECUADOREANS ARE UNINTERESTED IN THE NAPO AND WANT SOVEREIGN ACCESS TO THE MARANON, WHICH WOULD MEAN SPLITTING AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF PERU'S TERRITORY IN HALF. DE LA PUENTE SAID THAT WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE.

4. COMMENT: DE LA PUENTE WAS OBVIOUSLY NERVOUS ABOUT THE LETTER AND WHAT HIS SENSITIVE MILITARY COLLEAGUES MIGHT SEE AS THE USG LECTURING TO THE GOP ON HOW TO CONDUCT ITS AFFAIRS. (THERE IS STILL APPARENTLY A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF EMOTIONALISM IN THE GOP ABOUT AYALA'S SPEECH. ACCORDING TO MY ARGENTINE COLLEAGUE, FOREIGN MINISTER MONTES WAS SURPRISED ON HIS RECENT VISIT HERE TO FIND HOW GENUINELY UPSET THE PERUVIANS SEEMED TO BE CONFIDENTIAL

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ABOUT ECUADOR'S AMAZONIAN PRETENTIONS.) DE LA PUENTE IS PROBABLY STILL VULNERABLE ON HAVING STARTED TALKING TO AYALA IN THE FIRST PLACE -- AND HENCE, AGAIN, HIS NERVOUSNESS. BUT I THINK THE LETTER SERVES A USEFUL PURPOSE IN REMINDING HIM THAT WE ARE KEEPING A CLOSE WATCH ON THE ISSUE AND THAT THE HIGHEST LEVELS IN WASHINGTON ARE INTERESTED IN SEEING RESPONSIBLE PERUVIAN BEHAVIOUR.

5. THE MINISTER'S MESSAGE ON THE FUTURE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN CLEARER: THE PERUVIANS WILL NOT CONTEMPLATE SOVEREIGN ECUADOREAN ACCESS TO THE MARANON, THAT IS ALL THE ECUADOREANS WANT TO DISCUSS -- AND THEREFORE THE TALKS ARE OVER. THAT SEEMS TO ME IN FACT TO BE THE CASE. IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE WHAT THE TWO SIDES WOULD TALK ABOUT NOW WITH THEIR BASIC AND TOTALLY CONTRARY POSITIONS HAVING BEEN LAID OUT PUBLICLY. PERHAPS AFTER THIS SUMMER'S ELECTIONS THEY CAN BEGIN AGAIN. MEANWHILE, IT WOULD SEEM BEST TO ME TO ENCOURAGE BOTH SIDES TO LET THE MATTER REST AND TURN THEIR ENERGIES TO THE NOT INCONSIDERABLE ARRAY OF DOMESTIC PROBLEMS THEY BOTH FACE.

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